

Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

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My neighbor Goat Whiskers the Younger and his cowboy have been over helping roundup. Included in the trade was a lady to do the cooking. As I've mentioned before, Goat Whiskers the Younger has continued his father's good neighbor policy of trading work. We rarely stir the dust in the corrals of either outfit without helping each other.

The addition of cook has strengthened the contract. The eating end of the work is the vital factor in both operations. Young Whiskers, his hand, and our crew are stomach-oriented cowboys. Their hats can't blow off their heads without them thinking about something to eat. Fear of work is absent, but a deep phobia against missing a meal is omni-present.

To better prove this mania, allow me to relate what happened last week. The scene was a corral on the west side of the ranch where six or seven of us were busy marking lambs. At timed intervals, an old ewe would stagger across the pen, throw up her head, and hide. A crosswind from the west was perfecting the misery. Dogie lambs were bleating underfoot; few rangeland tragedies could have matched the happening.

These surrounding should have ruined anyone's appetite, but it didn't. Goat Whiskers' star man wanted to know whether we would have to eat in the pasture during the May shearing roundup.

Standing right there in the midst of a catastrophe that would sicken the yardman at a slaughterhouse, his only care was where lunch would be served some six weeks in the future.

In times to come, the world will know the religious leaders who are so blessed by their faith that immediate hardship will have no meaning. Crusades will be made to far away holy lands with complete indifference to the discomfort involved. Indian and Tibet will continue to produce priest and monks who can wade through masses of starving humanity to go to their temples. Witches will follow witchcraft and gurus will follow gurism. But not one of these fanatics will ever reach the point of concentration where they can stand in a penfull of sick sheep and worry about a meal that won't be ready in 45 days.

Search the world over. Go to the food bazaars of the Far East or consult the wine and cheese tasters of France. I don't care where you go. You won't find an hombre so devoted to his stomach that he can stand among sick sheep and wonder where he's going to be having lunch nearly two months hence.

Think what a happy world this would be if all the calamities of mankind could be dismissed in such an innocent manner. Memories of earthquakes could be erased by big barbecues. Hurricanes' devastation could be softened by picnics held in storm shelters. People everywhere could avoid a tremendous amount of psychic reaction to disasters by using food to forget the flood flames and the ashes.

I suppose a better manager than myself would know whether we were going to eat in the pasture during shearing. However, for the time being, tomorrow sounds like a long time off. Dry weather sheep ranching doesn't allow for long range planning.